



PARAGUAY SPEAKS



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If you place a pin point in the center of the South American continent you will not be far from Asuncion, the capital of Paraguay. This small country, only about two-thirds the size of Texas, has a population of approximately one million, 90 per cent of whom live on the east side of the great Paraguay River. One of two inland countries in South America, it has a semitropical climate with long hot summers and short—though sometimes quite cold—winters.



Despite its inland location, Paraguay was settled early by Spanish explorers who were searching for gold. They found the friendly Guarani Indians instead, settled on their land, and intermarried with them. The Paraguayan population is a result of this racial merger. The old Guarani language is still used along with Spanish.

Although the population is mainly Guarani-Spanish, it also includes immigrants from Poland, Russia, Spain, Italy, England, and even Japan. These foreigners tend to live in their own colonies with very little contact with the Paraguayan people.

Paraguayan independence was secured from Spain during the nineteenth century. Jealous of his freedom, the Paraguayan has resisted every effort to destroy his independence.

Ninety per cent of Paraguay's male population was killed in the Triple Alliance War of 1864-70. The destruction of home life, the amorality which exists to this day, the deep rooted poverty, and many other evils are blamed on this catastrophe.

The most prevalent religion is the Roman Catholic faith, and, as is sometimes true in backward countries, this verges on paganism. Individual saints and the Virgin Mary are worshiped more than Christ, or even God, and fear and death dominate their beliefs. A very large percentage of the population have nothing to do with the "Church," and have not been inside a church building since they were baptized as infants. Except for occasional instances of threats and oppositions, there is ample religious liberty.

CUSTOMS

The Paraguayan is a very friendly and charming person, and has great respect for the foreigner, especially the North American. He will urge

you to try his Paraguayan tea brewed with cold water. Usually the "gringo" cannot stand much of this drink, sipped from a cow's horn by means of a metal tube. "Chipa," which is made of cheese and mandioca flour and looks like an overgrown doughnut, is much more pleasing to the palate.

At slightly extra cost a woman on a donkey will bring vegetables, meat, and fruit to your door, even though there may not be much variety. Many women make their living this way, using leather bags strapped to the donkey as containers for their stock in trade. They go to the market very early, sitting on the donkey, holding their youngest child in their arms and a big black cigar in their mouths.

Everything is saved—tin cans, bottles, paper, rags, etc. In a country where such poverty exists, all these things have great value. We have tried to throw away objects of no apparent value, only to have them reappear later. The last object was a tin of spoiled apricots. It has been thrown away twice and has reappeared both times.

In the educated class you find some of the most cultured and polite people to be found anywhere. My own colleagues have shown me the ultimate in courtesy and co-operation.

BAPTIST WORK

Baptist work in Paraguay is over thirty years old. Our denomination is one of twenty or more evangelical groups working in the country. Other such groups include the Plymouth Brethren, the Disciples, the Free Methodists, the Salvation Army, the Anglicans, and the New Tribes Mission.

In 1919, Argentine Baptists appointed Señor Fernades as their first missionary to Paraguay. He organized the First Baptist Church, Asuncion, the following year. There are now two active churches in the capital city, another across the river in the extreme northern tip of Argentina, and several in the Russian colonies to the south.

The first Southern Baptist missionaries, Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Goldfinch, came from Uruguay in 1945 to strengthen the work which had already begun.



EVANGELISTIC WORK

Half of Paraguay's population lives within a fifty-mile radius of Asuncion, the capital. For this reason, most of the evangelistic work is centered there. The First Baptist Church, now thirty-two years old, has a membership of two hundred, and reports an encouraging number of baptisms each year. Sidney Goldfinch is the pastor. The church has one of the few departmentalized Sunday schools in the Paraguay-Argentine Baptist Convention, is self-supporting, and has recently constructed an educational plant.

The New City Church is only seven years old. Organized in August, 1946, it is led by Mr. Pedro Ruiz-Diaz, its capable Paraguayan pastor. Practically all its members tithe, and the church is completely self-supporting.

Every Sunday afternoon either the Sunday school lesson or the gospel is preached in over twenty-five places in Asuncion and the surrounding countryside. Two trucks go out fifty miles in different directions dropping off young people at various places to hold meetings.

The work in the interior is just beginning, and the prospects for the future are good.

EDUCATIONAL WORK

Living in our Baptist center in Asuncion are about a dozen young men. They work during the day at various jobs—bookkeeper, chauffeur, mechanic, laboratory technician, etc.—and go to the national schools at night. All are preparing to enter Christian service, and several hope to study in the International Seminary at Buenos Aires when their secondary education has been completed.

MEDICAL WORK

At the beginning of the medical work here in Paraguay we had to answer three questions: (1) Is there a definite need for medical work? (2) Can Southern Baptists meet this need? (3) Will the establishment of medical work, such as a hospital, help us to gain the ultimate aim of missions: preaching Christ to the lost? We found that all three questions could be answered in the affirmative.

The world is tired of hearing just words. It wants to see proof of the words. With an adequately equipped and staffed hospital we not only preach the gospel, but in a most effective way we show our gospel of love to those who need it. After all, that was Christ's method.

Our medical work began early in 1947. Miss Miriam Willis started a small day clinic in one of the slum areas of Asuncion, where few doctors would dare to go, and where most of the people lived in ignorance, fanaticism, and disease. The clinic was first regarded with suspicion, but gradually the people came bringing their sick children. A short while after the clinic had been established practically every home in the area was open to the gospel, and many people who before had stopped their ears to any such messages were coming to our services. This experience encouraged us to go ahead with a more comprehensive medical program. We decided to build a modern, well equipped and staffed hospital.

The new Baptist Hospital, located on a beautiful tree-lined property on the outskirts of Asuncion, was opened January 5, 1953. With its modern buildings and equipment, it is giving a marvelous testimony of Christ's love for suffering humanity. The Jones Memorial Chapel makes it clear to all that our main purpose is to preach Christ. A public address system makes it possible for all of the patients to hear daily devotional messages and preaching services on Sunday and Wednesday evening.



MANY NEEDS REMAIN

The needs still are many. In the evangelistic and educational fields, we need to train more and more of our young people as preachers, Sunday school teachers, and personal workers, for the nationals must do the bulk of this work. We need to develop strong rural work in many parts of the country which have not yet been reached.

In the medical work, we need more nurses immediately. To meet this need we must establish a school of nursing and train our own Christian young women. Some provision must also be made for the interior where doctors and hospitals are few. Our plan is to develop an ambulatory clinic: a truck fully equipped with clinical equipment and a team of a nurse, doctor, and driver. These will go each day into a different section of the interior to hold the clinic and conduct a preaching service.

Christ's kingdom is advancing, and many are being reached here in the heart of South America. If this work is to continue and to grow as it should, it is imperative for Southern Baptists to express their love for Christ through their mission program in this and other parts of the world.



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